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ABSTRACT

A successful evaluation or improvement of teaching program ought to develop after a careful consideration of the attitudes and perceptions of those most directly affected--namely students and faculty members. An understanding and awareness of the forces which control their actions on the intellectual-social-cultural environment of the university is necessary in order to implement an effective program in which students evaluate the performance of the instructor. Student assessment instruments often reflect a clear set of skills and personality characteristics which must be possessed by teachers if they are to receive high ratings. On the other hand, the long selection and training process which finally produces a college teacher may systematically deemphasize the acquisition of those skills and even penalize those who acquire them. In order to improve instructor evaluation the programs: (1) should be under the auspices of faculty and not students; (2) should recognize that there are many profiles of effective teaching; (3) should emphasize growth and change; and (4) should emphasize the fact that students are recording perceptions, not making summative evaluation. (MLP)

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IMPROVING EVALUATION PROGRAMS THROUGH BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE COLLEGE STUDENT AND HIS PROFESSOR

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On some historic occasion lost in antiquity, one of our ancestors made the observation, "you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink." This axiom proved itself many times in the intervening centuries, with as many applications to education as to animal husbandry. The best laid plans and programs of progressive educators have often floundered or failed because of the attitudes of those being "lead to water." Those who have balked have been students, parents, teachers, or at times all three.

The most recent innovations in higher education which may fall victim to apathy, lethargy, or obstinancy are programs of evaluation and improvement of teaching. Such programs are occasionally met with open defiance, but more often with sullen distrust or disinterest. The programs may be well founded and funded, and have top level administrative support, but still success is elusive.

It is a contention in this paper that any successful evaluation or improvement of teaching program ought to develop after a careful consideration of the attitudes of those most directly affected--namely students and faculty members. An understanding and awareness of the forces which control their actions in a very complex intellectual-social-cultural environment is necessary.

And, without their support no program, no matter how forcefully imposed, will succeed.

STUDENTS

A handful of institutions have maintained teacher evaluation programs for many years. These typically have been student instigated and managed, and designed to provide information for students at enrollment time. An element of modest rebelliousness has prevailed, with benign approval characterizing the administration. Faculties have tended to ignore or discount the results.

As we all know, the 1960's redefined student rebelliousness. Challenge and confrontation created an adversary relationship between student leaders and university faculties and administrators. It was during this period that most evaluation programs were established. Youthful impertinence gave way to wrath. Thus the motive for many teacher evaluation programs became revenge. Identification and publication of the names of those teachers who did not meet student standards was a primary concern. It is little wonder that these student-managed programs met with resistance.

There are now indications that student hostility is abating. No one knows if this is like the eye of a hurricane, ready to re-

commence, but that proportion of students who might be termed "activists or alienated"[1] seems to be diminishing. There is some evidence that these students, who were once preoccupied with revolutionizing the campus and the rest of the world as well, are adjusting to the system, not fighting it. "It has been called the 'new vocationalism,' or 'new focus on practicality,' and it has become the most notable trend among college students in the 1970's."[2]

At the same time another group, the "new students" is increasing in number. Defined broadly as those who "score in the lowest third among national samples of young people on traditional tests of academic ability,"[3] some of their personality characteristics may apply to at least half of the current college population. They are beset by fears of failure or substandard performance, they see college as a place for occupational training, and "are more likely to feel nervous or shy in the competitive

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[1]S. L. Halleck. "Twelve Hypotheses of Student Unrest." Stress and Campus Response, ed. by G. Kerry Smith. Jossey-Bass, Inc., San Francisco, 1968, pp. 115-133.

[2]Malcolm G. Scully. "Student Focus on Practicality Hits Humanities." The Chronicle of Higher Education, 8 (February 4, 1974) p. 1.

[3]K. Patricia Cross. Beyond the Open Door. Jossey-Bass, Inc., San Francisco, 1971, p. 13.

classroom; they are more eager for college assistance with problems related to academic achievement; and they are more interested in counseling help with their personal problems."[4] It is doubtful that this group, preoccupied with other concerns, will show much concern with evaluation programs. The same attitudes may prevail with other groups of non-traditional students now entering higher education.

There may be other indicators which would portend a future of student passivity. A tight job market, a possible recession, a future energy-related reduction in standards of living--all may affect students' thinking as they prepare during college for an uncertain future. Perhaps, then, we are returning after a short outburst of student enthusiasm to an era of detachment. As Feldman and Newcomb have reported,

> "Most students seem to be moderately satisfied with their colleges, though with no sense of enthusiasm or excitement; perhaps inevitable processes of adaptation lead to taking things for granted. Their attitudes toward faculty members are somewhat similar; students typically report little personal contact with them, and many students are often reasonably content to have it so."[5]

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[4] Ibid., p. 83.

[5] K. A. Feldman and T. M. Newcomb, The Impact of College on Students. Jossey-Bass, Inc., San Francisco, 1969, p. 257.

In summary, there is little evidence that students are eagerly awaiting an opportunity to assist in either evaluating their teachers or participating in time-consuming projects designed to improve instruction for a future group of students. Some reward, perhaps the promise of immediate learning gains, or even formal credit may be necessary if student assistance or leadership is desired.

FACULTY

With a defaulting student population, the management and support of evaluation and improvement programs in the 1970's may fall to the faculty. Yet it may be possible that the very nature of the teaching profession and those who choose to enter it works against such programs. In order to assess the chances of acceptance by this group, it is helpful to first examine the selection process for the profession and how this process molds the final product called the college teacher.

It is difficult to attempt to construct a faculty member profile by studying among other things his or her childhood or adolescent environment. One may wish to consult the work of Bloom and others,[6] however, for some interesting relationships between youth and career choices.

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[6]N. R. Bloom and Mervin Freedman. "Patterns of Faculty Response to Growing Student Diversity," Facilitating Faculty Development, ed. by Mervin Freedman. Jossey-Bass, Inc., San Francisco, 1973, pp. 29-69.

It is probable to state, however, that those destined for an academic career became interested in and have consistently been rewarded for intellectual accomplishment and the ability to work well with abstractions and ideas. Gustad claims that in general those who choose professorial careers are "intelligent, middle class, responsible, and ambitious. They believe self-improvement comes with hard work. They prefer essentially solitary and intellectually stimulating activities and are willing to defer immediate desires for long-range goals."[7]

Stated negatively, one almost derives from these studies an image of a compulsive person who has deferred his or her interests in people or things for the abstract world of ideas--who is at home in the cognitive domain but not at ease with affective matters. Keniston does nothing to dissuade one from this position when he describes the gauntlet many students (and almost all future professors) must pass if they are to succeed.

> "Not only have academic pressures mounted in the past generation, but these pressures have become more and more cognitive. What matters, increasingly, to admissions committees and college graders is the kind of highly intellectual, abstracting, reasoning ability that enables a student to do well on college boards, graduate records, and other admissions tests, and--once he is in college or graduate school--

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[7] J. W. Gustad. "Career Decisions of College Teachers." S.R.E.B. Research Monograph Series No. 2, Atlanta: Southern Regional Education Board, 1960.

> to turn out consistently high grades that will enable him to overcome the next academic hurdle. And while such intellectual and cognitive talents are highly rewarded, colleges increasingly frown upon emotional, affective, non-intellectual and passionate forms of expression. What is rewarded is the ability to delay, postpone and defer gratification in the interest of higher education tomorrow.
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> In contrast to these cognitive demands, there are extremely few countervailing pressures to become more feeling, morally responsible, courageous, artistically perceptive, emotionally balanced, or interpersonally subtle human beings. On the contrary, the most visible pressures on today's students are, in many ways anti-emotional, impersonal, quantitative and numerical. The tangible rewards of our college world--scholarships, admission to graduate school, fellowships and acclaim--go for that rather narrow kind of functioning involved in writing good final examinations, being good at multiple choice tests and getting good grades. Furthermore the tangible rewards of the post-collegiate professional world so demand a similar kind of cognitive functioning, at least in the early years. Thus it is the outstanding college and graduate student who goes on to coveted appointments in desirable hospitals, law firms, businesses, faculties and scientific laboratories."[8]

At about this time in the budding professor's career, he or she is often given the ignoble title of teaching assistant, assistant instructor, or graduate assistant. This teaching experience usually proceeds without support of any kind from the department.

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[8]Kenneth Keniston. "Drug Use and Student Values." Paper delivered to the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, Washington, D.C., November 7, 1966, p. 2.

Most readers of this paper have personalized and internalized this experience, so no elaboration is needed. The feelings of insecurity, incompetence, and lack of administrative support which accompany initial teaching assignments have been analyzed by Nowlis in an interesting fashion. According to him role-confusion and loss of identity are common side effects of this teaching experience.[9] In addition, the graduate assistant may perceive that teaching is the least preferred and most non-productive part of his training. It impedes the progress toward a degree and is given to those who cannot garner coveted research assistantships or other duties.

Even if the above is only moderately characteristic of the selection and self-selection process, it is understandable that recent studies portray the neophyte assistant professor as a rather insecure person who protects himself by being relatively autocratic and dogmatic in the classroom.[10]

Lest the wrong impression be made here, the qualities a new college teacher brings to the profession are not necessarily

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[9]Vincent Nowlis. "Graduate Student as Teacher." The Troubled Campus, ed. by G. Kerry Smith. Jossey-Bass, Inc., San Francisco, 1970, pp. 179-183.

[10]Freedman, op. cit., pp. 61-68.

bad. Intelligence, persistence, curiosity, ambition, restraint, impersonality--yes, even authoritativeness and dogmatism are at times very admirable characteristics. In fact they may even be essential for those who work and teach at the frontiers of knowledge.

The characteristics which emerge from the self-selection, selection and training process are later reinforced as the young professional conforms to the pressures which lead to promotion and acceptance by peers--scholarship, research, a further narrowing of interests until he or she becomes an authority in a particular subset of a discipline.

Into this orderly, predictable process comes a program called "evaluation of teaching," along with its threatened use as a criterion for promotion and merit salary increases. Even a cursory examination by the faculty member of the program reveals an underlying paradox: evaluation instruments emphasize characteristics which systematically have been deemphasized in the long professional selection process. That is, the skills which the professor has developed since childhood are not particularly recognized, and perhaps more important, those characteristics which the professor has chosen not to develop (and been rewarded for these choices) are now being emphasized.

For instance, the scale derived from the instruments developed by the Center for Research and Development in Higher Education include: analytic/synthetic approach, organization/clarity, instructor-group interaction, instructor-individual student interaction, and dynamism/enthusiasm.[11] In at least three of these scales, the emphasis is upon social awareness, attitude toward teaching, and sensitivity. A composite of Billy Graham, Dale Carnegie, and Karl Menninger is required to achieve a high score on these scales, it seems.

Is it not understandable that the individual faculty member feels uneasy? He has been asked to develop one set of skills and now is being measured by another. This feeling of uneasiness may not be verbalized directly; it may take the form of attacks on the reliability and validity of the instruments themselves, or upon administrative procedures. In any event, one must question faculty responsiveness and enthusiasm as they are asked to sponsor such programs in the 1970's.

We now have on one hand a group whose interests have diminished (the students) and another (the faculty) who feel threatened by the imposition of an evaluation or improvement program. Because student interest level is unpredictable, those

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[11] Milton Hildebrand, et al. Evaluating University Teaching. Center for Research and Development in Higher Education, Berkeley, 1971, p. 18.

who wish to facilitate faculty development will increasingly be forced to solicit the cooperation of the faculty.

With the above constraints in mind, how can one best set out to create a mood of cooperation among faculty?

First, for reasons previously stated, programs must be under the auspices of the faculty, not the students, and must stress "improvement" rather than "evaluation." Evaluation is an inevitable objective, but it cannot be the overriding goal during development.[12]

Second, the program should recognize at the outset that there are many profiles in teaching, not one model to which each professor's scores are compared; and, these styles or characteristics are, in part, the perogative of the professor. The teaching style, e.g. teacher-directed or student-directed--and teaching methodology--lecture, discussion, etc., can and should vary with level of course and discipline. Any instrument should measure to what extent the instructor's style and methodology is being realistically perceived by students within the context of course level and discipline.

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[12]F. N. Kerlinger. "Student Evaluation of University Professors." School and Society, 1971, 99, pp. 353-356.

Third, the programs should emphasize growth and change, according to the individual's own objectives. Mere maintenance of adequate or high student ratings is not the issue. Participants should be allowed to zero in on skills or behaviors which they want to develop, and these change scores, over time, should be paramount; too often evaluation instruments are administered as a crash program to determine if a professor's "teaching" skills match his research and service credentials in a promotion file.

Fourth, programs initially should emphasize the fact that students are recording perceptions, not making summative evaluations. Students should be considered reporters, not judges. Or, "consider the student's role as that of an interested observer, rather than as a judge. Students can describe classroom events without having to judge their values."[13] Whether students can and should "judge" their superiors is a matter for another forum or paper. The point is, many professors believe they cannot and should not, but are willing to accept their observations.

Perhaps another more subtle but important appeal for constructive improvement and evaluation programs is related to

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[13]Robert J. Menges. "The New Reporter: Students Rate Instruction," Evaluating Learning and Teaching, ed. by C. Robert Pace. Jossey-Bass, Inc., San Francisco, 1973, p. 60.

simple "enjoyment." For many faculty, teaching is restricted to one formal style, never varying except for the occasional updating of lecture notes. It is little wonder that the History of the Boer War becomes a trial for both teacher and student after the professor has offered it for ten consecutive semesters. Good improvement programs ought to expand pedagogical horizons, offering alternatives to the traditional and showing that the teaching process can be an intellectual challenge.

The development of innovative and more personalized styles of teaching may not only be intellectually rewarding but also may protect future jobs. As budgets become tighter and as educational technology advances, we can expect modes of delivery such as computer assisted instruction and programmed instruction to replace some of those positions which have been filled by lecturers. Axelrod claims that the teacher-craftsman and the lecturer-artist, no matter how competent, may become "unnecessary" in the future, leaving the "teacher-artist" alone to maintain the student-teacher personal relationship.[14]

Finally, and perhaps most important, evaluation and improvement programs will continue to meet resistance as long

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[14]Joseph Axelrod. The University Teacher as Artist: Toward an Aesthetics of Teaching with Emphasis on the Humanities. Jossey-Bass, Inc., San Francisco, 1973.

as the professional selection and training process remains unchanged. If nothing else, future professors ought to know what they are getting into--that increasingly their success will be partly determined by their ability to relate well w'th and be sensitive to students. Those who feel threatened by this spectre should look for careers in research-oriented institutions or in industry.

Improvement programs, then, must start with graduate students, and be part of the selection and educational process. There is plenty of evidence that young teachers can be taught to improve their classroom skills (at least at the public school level) and there is no reason to believe that graduate students would be impervious to such exposure.

The controlling agents in this process are deans and department chairmen. They have always been concerned about the scholarly and research skills of their graduates--departmental "reputation" has been at stake. As the job market tightens, mobility lessens, pressures for accountability continue, and teaching loads increase, the teaching competence of job-hunting graduates will be linked to the reputation of departments. Chairmen will then cooperate with if not seek out those who manage improvement and evaluation programs. Then, and perhaps

only then, we may see a sincere effort to develop in graduate students and ranking faculty, as well, those characteristics we associate with competent classroom instruction.